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ABSTRACT

This guide to Spanish language proficiency standards is intended to aid the University of Minnesota's staff in developing curricula and tests for the university's language courses, and to help foreign language teachers outside the university understand the university's language programs. The standards are geared toward the language skills expected of students having completed 3 quarters of university study (for program entrance) or 6 quarters (for graduation). An introductory section outlines the process of developing the standards, the resources necessary for proficiency-oriented programs to bring most students to the levels defined, and notes on interpreting and applying the proficiency guidelines. A section on testing describes the methods and instruments used. For each of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Provisional Proficiency Guidelines are presented and the university's program entrance and graduation standards are outlined. (MSE)

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Foreign Language
Proficiency Standards for Entrance and Graduation

College of Liberal Arts

A Guide for Teachers
of
Spanish

University of Minnesota
1986

The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer and specifically invites and encourages applications from women and minorities.

In the past few years the University of Minnesota has increased what was already a sizable commitment to international education. Part of the increased commitment was a strengthening of the foreign language requirement in the College of Liberal Arts.

The strengthened graduation requirement on the one hand says that a graduate of CLA should have significant skills in at least one foreign language. The entrance standard, on the other hand, signifies CLA support for foreign language learning which occurs prior to admission to CLA, in elementary schools, secondary school, or in other colleges and universities.

Important in the entrance standard and the graduation requirement is the fact that they are stated in terms of proficiency: How well can the student use the language in real communication? A statement in terms of proficiency is a departure from usual measuring of the past. The standard/requirement is not simply a measure of how long students have been enrolled in foreign language classes, nor is it a measure of what students know about the language.

This Guide for Teachers is intended as a guide for our staff in development of curriculum and tests for our CLA language courses. It is also intended for foreign language teachers outside the University so that they may better understand our foreign language programs.

I would like to thank the teachers at the University but particularly teachers from high schools and other colleges who participated in the development of the proficiency standards described in this document. I hope the experience has been as exciting for you as it has for us.

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INTRODUCTION

The College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota has mandated the establishment of proficiency standards according to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for entrance to the College and as a requirement for graduation with the B.A. degree. The first step in establishing entrance standards and graduation requirements has been consultation with teachers of French, German and Spanish at all levels of instruction in the state of Minnesota. This group, after lengthy deliberations and training, set preliminary standards for the three most commonly taught languages. Before presentation of the standards and requirements, however, it is essential to present some of the assumptions with which the consultative group operated.

This *Prospectus* is just one attempt on the part of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota to pass on information to language teachers, school advisers and administrators at all levels of instruction. It is important to point out here what this document is not: it is not a theoretical statement; it is not a curricular guide; it is not a statement on method. By communicating the new standard for entrance and the new requirement for graduation, the College does not intend to interfere in any way with solid programs of second language instruction already available to students throughout the state.

First and foremost, it is important to understand that the CLA proficiency standards are geared to what is expected after three quarters at the University for entrance and, for graduation, after six quarters. "Expected" is not to be interpreted as the goal for an average student at the end of the third or the sixth quarter. The term "expected" means, rather, the level of proficiency in speaking, listening, reading and writing which most students should have if they pass the course. Any curricular design which desires to prepare its students for entrance or for graduation should set its goals at least one ACTFL level beyond the standards set by CLA for entrance and for graduation.

The preliminary proficiency standards for entrance and graduation are as follows:

	ENTRANCE STANDARD	GRADUATION REQUIREMENT
Listening:	Intermediate Low	Intermediate High
Reading:	Intermediate Low	Intermediate High
Speaking:	Novice High	Intermediate Mid
Writing:	Novice High	Intermediate Mid

The proficiency levels for the Entrance Standard and the Graduation Requirement were the result of a lengthy process of training and deliberation. In Summer 1984, a group of 30 Minnesota teachers of French, German and Spanish completed a three-week intensive ACTFL proficiency training program conducted by nationally known experts. The group had 10 teachers in each of the three languages, and within each language group, there was equal representation from secondary and post-secondary teachers. In the year following this training workshop, most of the 30 teachers continued with a series of three more specialized workshops and follow-up sessions: 1) curricular implications for the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines; 2) testing theories especially for listening, reading and writing; and 3) writing a pool of test items for pilot testing. It is this group of specially trained teachers which entered into lengthy deliberations and decided upon the proficiency levels for the Entrance Standard and the Graduation Requirement.

RESOURCES NECESSARY FOR PROFICIENCY-ORIENTED PROGRAMS TO BRING MOST STUDENTS TO THE LEVELS SET FOR THE ENTRANCE STANDARD AND THE GRADUATION REQUIREMENT

Class Size

The University of Minnesota has decided that individual classes in French, German and Spanish will not exceed 25 students. It is important to emphasize that this maximum of 25 students is not meant as an average; no single class admits more than 25 students. Classes this size allow teachers to maximize opportunities to deal with content,function and accuracy as prescribed in detailed descriptions of levels for the Entrance Standard and the Graduation Requirement (presented in the next main section of this prospectus). Classes this size also permit adequate input, small group work (in threes rather than in fives) as well as regular written exercises for correction and feedback. When schools schedule classes larger than 25 students they may assume that student proficiency will suffer.

Multi-Year Classes

Effective classroom management is not possible where teachers have to teach students who have had 2, 3 and 4 years of instruction and are placed in a single class. Though all second language classes have students at differing proficiency levels, proficiency development is very difficult when the range of levels is too large.

Use of Time

A proportion of classroom time (up to 40%) should be spent on proficiency practice where the focus of the lesson is on the expression of meaning rather than accuracy. If proficiency practice forces some drill out of the classroom, this accuracy drill may be accomplished through homework or by means of computer courseware. Group work, use of paired learning, etc, may allow more time for proficiency-oriented activities. Time for proficiency development is a critical factor. The amount of time on task for the development of proficiency in an academic year is limited.

There are approximately 115 hours in an academic year on the college/university level; there are approximately 170 hours on the secondary school level of which 100 hours are estimated to be time on task.

Equipment

The following needs are considered minimal by University staff to provide for an effective proficiencybased curriculum in the College of Liberal Arts.

FOR THE CLASSROOM

- An overhead projector
- Tape recorder
- Slide-filmstrip projector
- Movie projector
- Small groups: junction box (to connect with tape recorder) and headsets
- Access to video recording and playback
- Adequate supplies, e.g., photocopying, courseware, thermofax
- Resource materials, e.g., dictionaries, at least one major newspaper or magazine, cultural resource materials, a range of reading and listening materials

FOR THE PROGRAM

- A learning laboratory with the following:
- Listening/record stations which allow students both to listen and to record
- Audio-cassette library
- High-speed audio-cassette copier (home study cassettes)
- Portable video record and playback facilities
- Video-cassette library
- Microcomputers (IBM, Apple, Macintosh)
- Computer disk library
- Courseware generation systems need to be available to the instructional staff, e.g., DASHER, which can generate drill materials

Personnel

Staff development should be commensurate with the concept of proficiency; teachers should have the opportunity to become aware of and to use proficiency development concepts in their teaching and curricula. Supervision of instruction should be based on proficiency concepts. Advanced students, Amity aides and other native speakers may be used as informants to help develop proficiency in a proficiency-based curriculum, and team teaching in this kind of program could be useful in presenting a model of communication. Staff exchanges between and among levels could help teachers remain up-to-date in the language. Pre- and in-service teacher preparation should include the following:

1) Cooperative group structures in learning
2) Proficiency-based curricular design
3) Language skills
4) General language teaching methods
5) Testing of language development

At the University, TA's need to have background in language learning and teaching, in addition to a background in their specialization for graduate study. Professional associations (e.g., MCTFL and the AAT groups) could provide opportunities to help teachers keep their language current.

Materials

Publishers must be encouraged to orient materials toward proficiency development, since teachers need support from systematically prepared materials.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROFICIENCY DESCRIPTIONS

The descriptions of proficiency at each level in each skill contain three components: content, function, and accuracy. Thus, the descriptions in each of the language skill areas (i.e., listening, reading, speaking, and writing) include information about the topics or *content* areas with which the student is familiar, the linguistic *functions* or tasks that can be expressed and/or understood, as well as the degree of *accuracy* with which the message is communicated and/or understood. Judgments of an individual's proficiency take all three factors into account.

In both the Entrance Standard and Exit Requirement, certain functions, topics, and accuracy levels are expected to be controlled in a sustained manner while others are controlled only partially. Sustained control can be described by the use of such modifiers as "frequently" or "usually", while partial control is described by modifiers such as "uneven" or "occasionally". Thus, at the level of Novice High, the student will <u>consistently</u> be able to "list using memorized utterances and use memorized material to ask and answer simple questions" in content areas covering basic social formulae and basic topic areas, but will only <u>sometimes</u> be able to "create statements or questions and participate in very simple face-to-face conversations." Note that at the level of Novice High there is no <u>consistent</u> accuracy. The student's speech will contain numerous errors and will at times be incomprehensible. However, the student will <u>sometimes</u> be able to use the present-tense of the most common regular and irregular verbs and use the concept of subject/verb agreement.

USING THE PROFICIENCY DESCRIPTIONS

How are the following description of proficiency intended to be used? Let's first make it clear what they are <u>not</u> intended to be used for. They are only <u>descriptions</u> of the minimal proficiency expected at each level. They should therefore be interpreted neither as statements of goals, nor as descriptions of curriculum. Given the gradual, developmental nature of the language acquisition process, the curriculum of a second language program must be targeted well <u>beyond</u> these proficiency descriptions. In fact, it is only when we incorporate in the curriculum functions and content which go beyond the minimal proficiency levels that the minimal levels themselves will be

attained by our students. Thus, the guidelines do not in themselves constitute a curriculum but are rather only a framework for a curriculum. In the same way, the guidelines are not in themselves tests of language proficiency, but rather a framework for testing.

In addition to serving as a framework for curriculum and testing, the guidelines provide a potentially very useful aid to communication about language learning between all parties interested in this process. The guidelines give us a more precise picture of the language learning process than we have had before, plus providing a relatively standard framework of levels, so that we can talk with each other with much more certainty that we understand each other. Thus, the guidelines are already facilitating communication across educational levels such as elementary to secondary and secondary to college and university, enabling us to begin to deal with the problems of articulation across these levels. Another important area of communication is that between language educators and their "clients" or other persons to whom they are responsible, namely students, parents, and administrators. The guidelines offer us concrete concepts for talking about what are realistic expectations for the outcome of language study in a given situation.

You will notice that we have included in what follows the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for all levels (except those described for the College of Liberal Arts entrance standards and exit requirements, where they have been broken into content, function and accuracy). The description of the Superior level is included in order to set the levels we are primarily concerned with into a larger developmental context. It must be kept in mind that reaching the Superior level normally takes years of study as well as living in the culture, and this is in fact a relatively infrequent accomplishment.

TESTING

Testing of language proficiency is integral to the CLA language requirement. There are two test batteries, one for the Entrance Standard and one for the Exit Requirement. Each test will include the four modalities of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The battery for the Entrance Standard tests listening and reading at Intermediate-Low, and speaking and writing at Novice-High. The battery for the Exit Requirement tests listening and reading at Intermediate-High, and speaking and writing at Intermediate-Mid.

These tests are criterion referenced tests which means that they are directly related to the descriptions of proficiency at the levels designated for the four modalities within the Entrance Standard or Exit Requirement. The form of the test is analogous to the Oral Interview Procedure. Several items, approximately 20%, are used as a warm-up. They are below the designated proficiency levels and are intended to give the student an opportunity to "get into the language". Forty percent of the items are at the designated level in what is called a Level Check. This number of items is to assure that students can sustain the designated proficiency level. Another 20% of the items in the test are in a category called Probe. These items are expected to push the student beyond the expected proficiency level. The final 20% of the items or Wind-Down intend to bring the student back to the level of proficiency designated for that modality. These are items that the individual, having the desired level, should feel comfortable responding to. It is intended that the students would leave the tests with a feeling that they are successful. In this test battery, the test items are not ordered in the usual easy to most difficulty items. Instead, they are organized by Warm-up, Level Check, Probe, and Wind-Down.

The manner of testing for proficiency at the Entrance Standard Level is generally well-known. The Reception Modalities (Listening and Reading) will be tested with the usual multiple-choice items for objective scoring. These tests have two foci: some discrete elements of a text and general comprehension. Some texts will be tested with several questions. Their intent is to determine if the student got the details in the text. Other texts will have only one question. Those items are intended to require a general comprehension of the text. For the Production Modalities (Speaking and Writing), the tests require students to produce language. The Speaking Test is a recorded test. Students respond to questions on a pre-recorded tape. For the Writing Test, students will respond to questions in writing.

These tests will be timed. The Speaking Test takes approximately 20 minutes. The tests for Listening, Reading, and Writing take approximately 45 minutes each. There will be ample time within this framework for students to demonstrate their ability to sustain proficiency at the designated levels.

Novice-Low

No practical understanding of spoken Spanish. Understanding is limited to cognates, borrowed words, high frequency social conventions, and occasional isolated words, such as *universidad, restaurante, gracias, taco, señor.* Essentially no ability to comprehend even short utterances.

Novice-Mid

Sufficient comprehension to understand some memorized words within predictable areas of need. Vocabulary for comprehension is limited to simple elementary needs, basic courtesy formulae and very simple memorized material relating to everyday objects and situations, such as *¿Qué tal? ¿Cómo te llamas?* or *¿Cómo se llama usted?* Utterances understood rarely exceed more than two or three words at a time, and ability to understand is characterized by long pauses for assimilation and by repeated requests on the listener's part for repetition, and/or a slower rate of speech. Confuses words that sound similar, such as *cosa/casa, hombre/hambre/, pero/perro.*

Novice-High

Sufficient comprehension to understand a number of memorized utterances in areas of immediate need. Comprehends slightly longer utterances in situations where the context aids understanding, such as at the table, in a restaurant/store, in a train/bus. Phrases recognized have for the most part been memorized: *¿Qué hora sale el tren? ¿En qué le puedo servir? La mantequilla, por favor.* Comprehends vocabulary common to daily needs. comprehends simple questions/statements about family members, age, address, weather, time, daily activities and interests: *¿Cuántos hermanos tiene usted? ¿Qué tiempo hace hoy?* Misunderstandings arise from failure to perceive critical sounds or endings. Understands even tailored speech with difficulty but gets some main ideas. Often requires repetition and/or a slowed rate of speed for comprehension, even when listening to persons such as teachers who are used to speaking with non-natives.

SUSTAINED CONTROL: **Statements in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe the concept of sustained control by the use of such modifiers as "frequently" or "usually".**

CONTENT	FUNCTION	ACCURACY
Usually controls:	Is usually able to:	Is usually able to:
--basic vocabulary related to school and personal life (e.g., age, address, family members, weather, daily activities, and interests) --basic survival needs (e.g., meals, lodging, transportation, time, simple instructions, routine commands --minimum courtesy requirements	--understand memorized material and non-memorized material such as simple questions and answers statements and face-to-face conversations	--understand basic facts and main ideas (i.e., the gist) in speech tailored to non-natives

PARTIAL CONTROL: **Statements in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe the concept of partial control by the use of such modifiers as "uneven" or "occasionally".**

CONTENT	FUNCTION	ACCURACY
Sometimes controls:	Is sometimes able to:	Is sometimes able to:
--some topics above and beyond survival needs, such as personal history and leisure time activities	--understand slightly more complex short conversations	--understand basic constructions (subject/verb or noun/adjective agreement, etc.) --recognize references to past and future time through verbs, adverbs, or prepositions

ACTFL PROVISIONAL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES: SPANISH LISTENING

Intermediate-Mid

Sufficient comprehension to understand simple conversations about some survival needs and some limited social conventions. Vocabulary permits understanding on topics beyond basic survival needs (e.g., personal history and leisure time activities), such as *¿Dónde nació usted? ¿Cuál es su pasatiempo favorito? ¿Qué piensa usted hacer este fin de semana?* Evidence of understanding basic constructions, e.g, subject-verb and noun-adjective agreement; some inflection is understood. Candidate's understanding of grammatical structure allows recognition of future and past references either by verb forms or by adverbs, adjectives, or prepositions of time *(pronto, mañana, ayer, el año pasado, antes, después).*

SUSTAINED CONTROL: **Statements in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe the concept of sustained control by the use of such modifiers as "frequently" or "usually".**

CONTENT	FUNCTION	ACCURACY
Usually controls:	Is usually able to:	Is usually able to:
--survival topics --limited social conventions --selected topics beyond immediate survival (e.g., biographical information and familiar situations) --familiar vocabulary (home, school, work, common daily activities, simple questions, purchases of food, clothing, etc.)	--understand short conversations --comprehend main ideas of more extended conversations or narrations	--comprehend references to past, present, and future time --understand simple verb tenses --understand question words

PARTIAL CONTROL: **Statements in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe the concept of partial control by the use of such modifiers as "uneven" or "occasionally".**

CONTENT	FUNCTION	ACCURACY
Sometimes controls:	Is sometimes able to:	Is sometimes able to:
--routine social conventions --limited school or work requirements --everyday topics, common personal and family news --special fields of interest --well-known current events and topics of public interest	--comprehend longer conversations --understand description and narration --understand essential points of a discussion and/or speech at an elementary level --get the gist of radio broadcasts	--comprehend past, present, and future tenses --understand face-to-face speech in standard Spanish spoken at a normal rate, with some repetition and rewording, by a native speaker <u>not</u> used to dealing with foreigners

Advanced

Sufficient comprehension to understand conversations about routine social conventions and limited school or work requirements. Able to understand face-to-face speech in standard Spanish spoken at a normal rate, with some repetition and rewording, by a native speaker not used to dealing with foreigners. Able to get the gist of some radio broadcasts. Understands everyday topics, common personal and family news, well-known current events, and routine matters involving school or work; descriptions and narration about current, past and future events; the essential points of a discussion or speech at an elementary level on topics in special fields of interest. For example: *¿Quién ganó las últimas elecciones locales? El Secretario del Estado viajará a Chile mañana para asistir a una reunión con el presidente de ese país. La clase media sufrirá el impacto de la inflación.*

Advanced Plus

Sufficient comprehension to understand most routine social conventions, conversations on school or work requirements, and discussions on concrete topics related to particular interests and special fields of competence. Often shows remarkable ability and ease of understanding, but comprehension may break down under tension or pressure (including unfavorable listening conditions). May display weakness or deficiency due to inadequate vocabulary base or less-than-adequate-knowledge of more complex syntactic structures (tense usage in simple and complex statements, passive voice constructions, relative clauses, word order, subject-object relationships). Still has some difficulty following radio broadcasts. Can sometimes detect emotional overtones. Increasing ability to understand between the lines (i.e., to make inferences).

Superior

Sufficient comprehension to understand the essentials of all speech in standard dialects, including technical discussions within a special field. Has sufficient understanding of face-to-face speech, delivered with normal clarity and speed in standard dialects on general topics and areas of special interest; understands hypothesizing and supported opinions. Has broad enough vocabulary that rarely has to ask for paraphrasing or explanation. Can follow accurately the essentials of conversations between educated native speakers, reasonably clear telephone calls, radio broadcasts, standard news items, oral reports, some oral technical reports, and public addresses on non-technical subjects. May not understand native speakers if they speak very quickly or use some slang or unfamiliar dialect. Can often detect emotional overtones. Can understand "between the lines" (i.e., make inferences).

Novice-Low

Unable to function in spoken Spanish. Oral production limited to occasional isolated words or expressions which have been borrowed into English or which are cognates of English words. Some examples are: *sombrero, taco, iolé!* Essentially no communicative ability.

Novice-Mid

Able to operate only in a very limited capacity within very predictable areas of need. Vocabulary is limited to that necessary to express simple elementary needs and basic courtesy formulae, such as *Buenos días; ¿Qué tal? Muy bien, gracias; ¿Cuánto es?* Syntax is fragmented, verbs are usually used in the infinitive form, and there is little or no subject-verb or noun-adjective agreement. The majority of utterances consist of isolated words or short formulae. Utterances are marked and often flawed by repetition of an interlocutor's words (*Q: ¿Qué comes por la mañana? *A: Comes por la mañana cereal.)* and frequent long pauses; speakers at this level cannot create original sentences or cope with the simplest situation. Pronunciation is frequently unintelligible and is strongly influenced by the first language. Can be understood only with difficulty, even by persons such as teachers who are used to dealing with non-native speakers, or in interactions where the context strongly supports the utterance.

SPANISH ENTRANCE STANDARD: Speaking (Novice-High)

SUSTAINED CONTROL: Statements in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe the concept of sustained control by the use of such modifiers as "frequently" or "usually".

CONTENT	FUNCTION	ACCURACY
Usually controls:	Is usually able to:	No consistent accuracy
--basic social formulae (greetings, leave-taking, etc.) --basic topic areas such as colors, clothing, food, numbers from zero to 100, days of the week, months, weather, time of day, parts of the body, family members and basic objects (classroom and home)	--use memorized material to ask and answer simple questions --list using memorized utterances	SEE PARTIAL CONTROL

*Denotes an error characteristic of speakers at this level.

PARTIAL CONTROL: Statements in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe the concept of partial control by the use of such modifiers as "uneven" or "occasionally".

CONTENT	FUNCTION	ACCURACY
Sometimes controls:	Is sometimes able to:	Is sometimes able to:
--characteristics of self and family members --description of simple activities (e.g., those of home, school, work) --basic survival and travel needs (e.g., ordering a meal, getting a hotel room, asking directions, handling transactions at the post office, bank, drugstore, etc.) --minimum courtesy requirements	--create simple statements or questions --participate in very simple face-to-face conversation	--use present-tense of common regular and irregular verbs --form complete sentences --use the concept of gender --use the concept of subject/verb agreement --be understood by native speakers in regular contact with non-native speakers

ACTFL PROVISIONAL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES: SPANISH SPEAKING

Intermediate-Low

Able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements. In areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics, can ask and answer simple questions, can respond to and sometimes initiate simple statements, and can maintain simple face-to-face conversation. Can ask and answer questions such as *¿Cuántos años tienes? ¿Cómo se llama usted? ¿Cuántas personas hay en tu familia?* and *¿Qué estudia usted?.* Can sustain a short conversation on such familiar topics as characteristics of self and family members (name, age, physical description), location and description of home, school, or work place, and other topics that involve an exchange of simple factual information. Can make one's needs known with great difficulty in a simple survival situation, such as ordering a meal, getting a hotel room, and asking for directions. Vocabulary is inadequate to express anything beyond basic information on familiar subjects and elementary needs. Little precision in information can be conveyed and misunderstandings frequently arise from limited vocabulary and grammar and erroneous phonology, but, with repetition, can generally be understood by native speakers in regular contact with foreigners attempting to speak Spanish. Little precision in information conveyed owing to tentative state of grammatical development and little or no use of modifiers.

SUSTAINED CONTROL: Statements in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe the concept of sustained control by the use of such modifiers as "frequently" or "usually".

CONTENT	FUNCTION	ACCURACY
Usually controls:	Is usually able to:	Is usually able to:
--personal information (autobiographical details, leisure time activities, daily schedule, and some future plans) --routine travel and survival needs	--create with language --satisfy routine travel and limited social demands (e.g., simple transactions in the post office, drug store, etc.) --ask and answer questions on familiar topics and in areas of immediate need --initiate and respond to simple statements and maintain simple face-to-face conversations	--demonstrate some grammatical accuracy in basic structures: (e.g., subject/verb agreement, present tense of regular and some irregular verbs (e.g., tener, poner, ser, estar, ir) --express future time with ir a+infinitive --be understood by speakers used to dealing with foreigners

PARTIAL CONTROL: Statements in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe the concept of partial control by the use of such modifiers as "uneven" or "occasionally".

CONTENT	FUNCTION	ACCURACY
Sometimes controls:	Is sometimes able to:	Is sometimes able to:
--factual topics beyond basic survival needs --topics of current public interest --topics of personal interest and autobiographical information	--manage description and narration --initiate and sustain a general conversation --communicate facts and explain point of view in a uncomplicated fashion --make factual comparisons --handle limited work requirements --communicate needs and thoughts in a situation with a complication (e.g., calling a mechanic for help with a stalled car, losing traveler's checks)	--use preterites of some regular and common irregular verbs --use some direct and indirect object pronouns --use ser vs. estar --be understood by native speakers not used to dealing with non-native speakers --use basic reflexive verbs

Intermediate-High

Able to satisfy most survival needs and limited social demands. Developing flexibility in language production although fluency is still uneven. Can initiate and sustain a general conversation on factual topics beyond basic survival needs. Can give autobiographical information and discuss leisure time activities. To a lesser degree, can talk about some past activities and future plans and non-personal topics, such as activities of organizations and descriptions of events, although ability to describe and give precise information in these areas is limited. Can provide sporadically, although not consistently, simple description and narration of present, past, and future events, although limited vocabulary range and insufficient control of grammar lead to much hesitation and inaccuracy. Extended discourse is largely a series of short, discrete utterances; cannot sustain coherent structures in longer utterances by the use of conjunctions or relative clauses. Has basic knowledge of the differences between *ser* and *estar* (physical description, nationality, profession vs. location, temporary health condition), although errors are frequent. Can control the present tense of most regular and the common irregular verbs, and has some control of basic reflexive verbs. May be able to use some direct and indirect object pronouns and occasionally use some knowledge of the preterite of some regular and common irregular verbs (*fui/fue, vi/vio),* but uses them only sporadically. Comprehensible to native speakers used to dealing with foreigners, but still has to repeat utterances frequently to be understood by the general public.

Advanced

Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements. Can handle with confidence but not with facility most social and general conversations. Can narrate, describe, and explain in past, present, and future time. Can communicate facts--what, who, when, where, how much--and can explain points of view, in an uncomplicated fashion but cannot conjecture or coherently support an opinion. Can talk in a general way about topics of current public interest (e.g., current events, student rules and regulations), as well as personal interest (work, leisure time activities) and can give autobiographical information. Can make factual comparisons (life in a city vs. life in a rural area, for example). Can handle limited work requirements, needing help in handling any complications or difficulties. Can make a point forcefully and communicate needs and thoughts in a situation with a complication (e.g., finding a bug in the soup in a restaurant, losing traveler's checks). Has a speaking vocabulary sufficient to respond simply with some circumlocutions. Can be understood by native speakers not used to dealing with foreigners, in spite of some pronunciation difficulties. Can usually handle elementary constructions quite accurately such as the present tense of regular and irregular verbs, and preterite and imperfect forms. Can use imperative forms and can occasionally use the subjunctive in indirect commands. Controls comparative and superlative adjectives; relative, interrogative, and simple and double object pronouns; and negatives (*nadie, nada, nunca,* etc.). Syntax, including position of adjectives, is usually correct. Grasps but does not control the basic differences in usage between the preterite and the imperfect (repeated or continuous vs. single action in the past, description vs. narration in the past) so that many mistakes are to be expected. Can link sentences together in limited discourse by using conjunctions and subordinate clauses.

Advanced Plus

Able to satisfy most work requirements and show some ability to communicate on concrete topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence. Can narrate, describe, and explain in past, present, and future time. Can communicate facts and explain points of view in an uncomplicated fashion consistently. Shows some ability to support opinions, explain in detail, and hypothesize, although only sporadically. Can discuss topics of current interest and personal interest, and can handle routine work requirements and some complications. Can handle situations involving complications that arise in everyday life (see Advanced Level examples) but will have difficulty with unfamiliar situations (e.g., losing a contact lens in a sink drain and going to a neighbor to borrow a wrench). Normally controls general vocabulary with some groping still evident. Speaking performance is often uneven (e.g., strong in either grammar or vocabulary, but not in both),. Areas of weakness in grammar can range from simple constructions such as noun-adjective, gender, and subject-verb agreement to more complex structures such as tense usage (imperfect vs. preterite), *ser* and *estar*, and relative clauses. Only sporadic ability to use the present subjunctive. Can regularly use the simple future, or *ir a* plus infinitive to express the future, as well as the present progressive and past progressive tenses. Controls possessive and demonstrative adjectives, and idiomatic expressions such as *acabar de* plus infinitive, *hace* plus preterite (ago), and *hacía* plus imperfect. Uses correct word order of all pronouns (including double object pronouns) and adverbs, such as *ya*, *todavía*, *aún*. Often shows remarkable fluency and ease of speech, but under tension or pressure language may break down.

Superior

Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics. Can discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with reasonable ease. Can support opinions, hypothesize, and conjecture. May not be able to tailor language to fit various audiences or discuss highly abstract topics in depth. Vocabulary is broad enough that speaker rarely has to grope for a word; good use of circumlocution. Pronunciation may still be obviously foreign. Control of grammar is good. Good control of preterite and imperfect (about 70% of the time); uses the present subjunctive appropriately most of the time and the imperfect subjective correctly about half the time. Can use all compound tenses, and can make simple contrary-to-fact statements. *Ser* and *estar* are almost completely controlled, as are reflexives and passive usages. Errors never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker.

Novice-Low

No functional ability in reading Spanish.

Novice-Mid

Sufficient understanding of written Spanish to interpret highly contextualized words or cognates within predictable areas. Vocabulary for comprehension limited to simple elementary needs, such as names, addresses, dates, signs indicating names of streets and avenues; building names (*hotel, farmacia, edificio);* short informative signs *(Prohibido Fumar, Entrada* and *Salida, Se Habla Inglés)* and signs with graphic explanations *(Damas* and *Caballeros* with drawings, *Una Vía* with arrow). Material understood rarely exceeds a single phrase and comprehension requires successive rereading and checking.

Novice-High

Sufficient comprehension of written language to interpret set expressions in areas of immediate need. Can recognize all letters of printed and written Spanish, including *ñ, rr, ll,* and is familiar with Spanish punctuation and diacritical marks *(¿?, ¡!, ',).* Where vocabulary has been mastered, can read for instructional and directional purposes standardized messages, phrases or expressions, such as some items on menus *(pollo, bistec, ensalada, té),* schedules, timetables, maps, signs indicating hours of operation *(Abierto de 9 a 12, Cerrado de 12 a 2),* social codes *(Mantenga Limpia Su Ciudad),* and street signs *(Alto, Ferrocarril, Hombres Trabajando).* Vocabulary and grammar limited to the most common nouns, adjectives, question words, and a few verb forms. Material is read for essential information. Detail is overlooked or misunderstood.

SPANISH ENTRANCE STANDARD: Reading (Intermediate-Low)

SUSTAINED CONTROL: Statements in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe the concept of sustained control by the use of such modifiers as "frequently" or "usually".

CONTENT	FUNCTION	ACCURACY
Usually controls:	Is usually able to:	Is usually able to:
--basic survival needs (e.g., names, addresses, dates, building names)	--understand mastered materials and recombinations of these	--understand highest frequency vocabulary, word order, and grammatical patterns when parallel to those of the native language
--social needs (e.g., related to personal life, family, classroom; social amenities)	--understand main ideas of simplest connected material	--understand common verbs in present tense, descriptive adjectives, adverbs of time and manner
	--understand simple telephone messages, personal notes, or simple letters	

PARTIAL CONTROL: Statements in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe the concept of partial control by the use of such modifiers as "uneven" or "occasionally".

CONTENT	FUNCTION	ACCURACY
Sometimes controls:	Is sometimes able to:	Is sometimes able to:
--travel vocabulary	--use guessing strategies to interpret vocabulary from context	--understand when syntax is related to simple NP+VP+NP constructions
--vocabulary related to products, prices, conditions of sale	--understand simple discourse for informative or social purposes (e.g., notes, letters)	--interpret various forms of negation or interrogation
--current events	--understand public announcements of events like concerts, etc.	--interpret present, future (ir a+ infinitive), and past (common regular and irregular preterites and/or adverbs of time) times
--familiar, high interest topics (e.g., biographical information food, clothing, work, school, family leisure activities, sporting and cultural events)	--understand advertisements from popular magazines	
	--understand general content of headlines of articles from popular magazines	

ACTFL PROVISIONAL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES: SPANISH READING

Intermediate-Mid

Sufficient comprehension to understand in printed form simple discourse for informative or social purposes. In response to perceived needs, can read public announcements to determine who, what, when, where, why, and how much information about such subjects as sporting events, concerts, parades, and celebrations. Can also identify products, prices, and some conditions of sale in popular, illustrated advertising for everyday items, such as food, clothing, work or school supplies, and travel. Can comprehend a note or letter in which a writer used to dealing with non-native readers describes self and family, ages, occupations, residence, personality traits, and common preferences when high frequency vocabulary or cognates are used. Understands general content of headlines in newspapers or article titles in popular magazines, such as *Semana*, *Hola*, and *Cambio 16*, if the content is familiar or of high interest. Understands facts and follows events in simple narration, authentic or specially prepared or edited when discourse consists of basic NP + VP + NP constructions. Can interpret negation, interrogation in various forms. Is fairly consistent in interpreting present time with present-tense verbs, future with *ir a* + infinitive, and past with basic regular and the eight to 10 most common irregular preterite-tense verbs, but still relies greatly on adverbs (*ayer*, *antes*, *después*) to verify relations of events in time. Has some difficulty with the cohesive factors in discourse, such as matching pronouns with referents and connecting ideas brought together by relative pronouns. Uses guessing strategies to interpret vocabulary consisting of regular cognate patterns, and highly contextualized items. May have to read several times before understanding.

SUSTAINED CONTROL: Statements in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe the concept of sustained control by the use of such modifiers as "frequently" or "usually".

CONTENT Usually controls:	FUNCTION Is usually able to:	ACCURACY Is usually able to:
--descriptive material on daily life and routines, biographical information, leisure activities, travel, movies, and other general-interest topics	--understand simple paragraphs for personal communicaton, information or recreation --read invitations, social notes, personal letters and some simple business letters on familiar topics --identify the main ideas in simple articles in popular magazines, and other nontechnical information sources --use contextual clues to extract meaning --read for pleasure uncomplicated authentic or edited prose and poetry and specially edited texts; simple material on Hispanic culture and civilization	--understand references to past, present, and future time

PARTIAL CONTROL: Statements in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe the concept of partial control by the use of such modifiers as "uneven" or "occasionally".

CONTENT Sometimes controls:	FUNCTION Is sometimes able to:	ACCURACY Is sometimes able to:
--familiar subjects such as sports, travel, movies, theater, food, music, news items, biographical information family topics	--read simple authentic printed material or edited textual material --read uncomplicated, authentic prose, newspapers, popular magazines, personal letters --read unedited simple prose fiction from carefully chosen authors, usually contemporary (e.g., selections in Sunday newspaper supplements, selections in daily newspapers, special anthologies on culture)	--understand past, present, and future tenses --recognize subjects vs. objects --comprehend relationship of subordinate to main clauses --interpret more complex cohesive devices such as object pronouns, relative pronouns, conjunctions

Advanced

Sufficient comprehension to read simple authentic printed material or edited textual material within a familiar context. Can read uncomplicated, authentic prose on familiar subjects (sports, travel, movies, theater, food, music, current events), news items in newspapers and popular magazines, biographical information in personal letters on family topics. Reads within the limits of identifiable vocabulary some unedited texts, such a prose fiction, from carefully chosen authors, usually contemporary. Such selections might appear in Sunday newspaper supplements, other daily papers, or special anthologies on modern culture. Sources include most major newspapers from Hispanic cities, popular magazines, and news magazines published for the general public *(Visión, Tiempo)*. Misunderstandings may stem from lack of comprehension of the cultural or situational context, or from misinterpretation of grammatical clues that have been only partially assimilated to this point. Has some understanding of past time relations involving preterite vs. imperfect, but typically can recognize only limited present subjunctive meanings. Can follow essential points of written discussion at level of main ideas and some supporting ones with topics in a field of interest or where background exists, although will tend not to be able to draw inferences.

Advanced Plus

Sufficient comprehension to understand most factual information in non-technical prose as well as some discussions on concrete topics related to special interests. Able to read for information and description, to follow sequence of events, and to react to information read. Can separate main ideas from lesser ones and use that division to advance understanding. In major newspapers and magazines, can read international items and social and cultural news. Understanding of specialized items depends upon individual interests and background, at this level can read material in own areas of interest. Within literary fields of interest, can read non-esoteric prose, including critical articles and books. Can read signs, posters, advertisements, and public announcements. Can follow simple printed directions for cooking and other projects within areas of expertise. Guesses logically at new words by using linguistic and non-linguistic contexts and prior knowledge. Is able to comprehend most high-frequency idiomatic expressions, but will still have difficulty with figurative meanings. Can correctly interpret most indicators of time relations, including indicative verb endings, adverbial expressions (*antes de que, después de que, luego)* and expressions with *hacer*. Has a good understanding of meanings expressed by the present subjunctive, and is able to interpret imperfect subjunctive part of the time (e.g., with impersonal expressions such as *era necesario que*, or expressions of volition or emotion such as *quisiera que* or *sentía que)*. May react personally to the material but does not yet detect subjective attitudes, values, or judgments reflected in the style of writing.

Superior

Able to read standard newspaper items addressed to the general reader, routine correspondence, reports and technical material in a field of interest at a normal rate of speed (at least 220 WPM). Can gain new knowledge from material in a variety of publications on a wide range of unfamiliar topics related to fields of interest. Can interpret hypotheses, supported opinions, and documented facts, as well as figurative devices, stylistic differences, and humor. Can read most literary genres in the original: novels, essays, poetry, short stories, and most literature written for the general public. Reading ability is not subject dependent. Broad general vocabulary, knowledge of most structures, and development of strategies for logical guessing allow for successful interpretation of unfamiliar words, idioms, or structures. Verb tenses and moods have been largely mastered, including irregular uses of past subjunctive and conditional. Able to achieve overall comprehension of material, even though there may be some gaps in detail. Is generally able to comprehend facts, although misinterpretation may still occur. Can draw inferences, but may be unable to appreciate nuances or stylistics.

Novice-Low

No functional ability in writing Spanish.

Novice-Mid

No practical communicative writing skills. Able to copy isolated words and short phrases. Able to transcribe previously studied words or phrases. Able to write name, address, dates and other numbers, as well as common expressions such as those used in greetings and leave-takings.

SPANISH ENTRANCE STANDARD: Writing (Novice-High)

SUSTAINED CONTROL: Statements in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe the concept of sustained control by the use of such modifiers as "frequently" or "usually".

CONTENT	FUNCTION	ACCURACY
Usually controls:	Is usually able to:	No consistent accuracy
--basic social formulae (greetings, leave-taking, etc.)	--write simple fixed expressions and limited memorized material	SEE PARTIAL CONTROL
--basic vocabulary related to personal life and school (e.g., cardinal numbers one to 20, colors, days of the week, months of the year, dates, simple autobiographical information, common objects)	--copy and transcribe --make lists --supply information	

PARTIAL CONTROL: Statements in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe the concept of partial control by the use of such modifiers as "uneven" or "occasionally".

CONTENT	FUNCTION	ACCURACY
Sometimes controls:	Is sometimes able to:	Is sometimes able to:
--cardinal numbers 20 to 100	--write simple statements and questions, recombinations of learned material	--use present tense of common regular and irregular verbs (e.g., hablar, comer, vivir, ser, tener, querer)
--familiar topics grounded in everyday experience: likes and dislikes, daily routines, dates and times, everyday events	--write short messages	--use basic word order N-V-Complement when structure corresponds to native language
	--take simple notes on familiar topics	--use interrogative words
	--compose short paragraphs	--make some sociolinguistic distinctions (formal vs. informal you, titles of address, etc.)
		--be understood by a native reader used to dealing with non-native speakers

Intermediate-Low

Has sufficient control of the writing system to meet limited practical needs. Can write short messages, such as simple questions or notes, postcards, phone messages, and the like. Can take simple notes on material dealing with very familiar topics within the scope of limited language experience. Material produced consists of recombinations of learned vocabulary and structures into simple sentences. Can express present and future by using the present tense and adverbs of time such as *mañana, esta noche, la semana próxima, el año próximo.* For example: *Tengo un examen mañana; Yo voy a Caracas la semana próxima.* Generally cannot express past time by past tenses, but may incorrectly use the present tense and an adverb of time such as *ayer, la noche pasada, esta mañana* to convey past meaning. Uses sporadically forms such as possessive adjectives, demonstrative and interrogative adjectives, and partitive articles, but not always correctly. Vocabulary is limited to common objects and cognates, and is inadequate to express anything but elementary needs. Can express numbers from 1-100 with some misspellings. Often inserts native-language vocabulary for unknown words, and is generally not capable of circumlocution to get meaning across. Writing tends to be a loose collection of sentences or sentence fragments on very familiar topics (likes and dislikes, general routine, everyday events or situations). Makes continual errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation, but writing can be read and understood by a native reader used to dealing with foreigners. Able to produce appropriately some fundamental sociolinguistic distinctions in formal and familiar style, such as appropriate subject pronouns, titles of address and basic social formulae.

*Denotes an error characteristic of speakers at this level.

SPANISH EXIT REQUIREMENT: Writing (Intermediate-Mid)

SUSTAINED CONTROL: Statements in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe the concept of sustained control by the use of such modifiers as "frequently" or "usually".

CONTENT	FUNCTION	ACCURACY
Usually controls:	Is usually able to:	Is usually able to:
--simple survival needs --very simple social demands --familiar topics grounded in personal experience (e.g., likes and dislikes, daily routines, everyday events, dates and times, immediate surroundings at home and in the classroom)	--write short paragraphs --take simple notes	--use present tense of most regular verbs, ir a+ infinitive to express future time --use basic constructions (N-V Complement)

PARTIAL CONTROL: Statements in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe the concept of partial control by the use of such modifiers as "uneven" or "occasionally".

CONTENT	FUNCTION	ACCURACY
Sometimes controls:	Is sometimes able to:	Is sometimes able to:
--most survival needs --simple social demands --familiar topics (e.g., auto-biographical information, preferences, daily routine, everyday events and situations) --biographical data --work experience --simple current events --factual topics	--write brief synopses and paraphrases --take notes in some detail on familiar topics --use circumlocution when necessary --write simple letters --write short compositions --write short narratives and descriptions	--use correct vocabulary to express simple ideas --express past, present and future time --use a limited number of cohesive devices (e.g., direct object pronouns) --use correct gender, adjective agreement and placement

ACTFL PROVISIONAL PROFICIENY GUIDELINES: Spanish Writing

Intermediate-High

Sufficient control of writing system to meet most survival needs and limited social demands. Can take notes in some detail on familiar topics (autobiographical information, preferences, daily routine, simple descriptions and narration of everyday events and situations) and respond to personal questions using elementary vocabulary and common structures. Can write simple letters, brief synopses and paraphrases, summaries of biographical data and work experience, and short compositions on familiar topics. Can create sentences and short paragraphs relating to most survival needs (food, lodging, transportation, immediate surroundings and situations) and limited social demands. Can express fairly accurately present and future time. Produce some past verb forms, but not always accurately or with correct usage. Shows good control of elementary vocabulary and some control of basic syntactic patterns, but major errors still occur when expressing more complex thoughts. Dictionary usage may still yield incorrect vocabulary to express simple ideas. Generally does not use basic cohesive elements of discourse to advantage (relative constructions, pronouns, connectors, and the like). Writing, though faulty, is comprehensible to native speakers used to reading Spanish written by non-natives. Is able to express a few thoughts for which vocabulary is unknown via circumlocution, but may insert native-language syntactic patterns when expressing ideas beyond current level of linguistics compentence.

Advanced

Able to write routine social correspondence and simple discourse of at least several paragraphs on familiar topics. Can write simple social correspondence, take notes and write cohesive summaries, resumés, and short narratives and descriptions on factual topics in the past, present, and future time. Able to write about everyday topics using both description and narration. Has sufficient vocabulary to write simple statements with some circumlocution. Can write about a limited number of current events of daily situations and can express personal preferences and observations in some detail using basic structures. Is able to recycle new but meaningful phrases whether lexical or structural, i.e., lifts phrases appropriately, writing appears more sophisticated. When writing own thoughts, is more likely to paraphrase according to native language at times. Still makes errors in spelling and accent marks, but controls the most common formats and punctuation conventions. Good control of noun, adjective, and verb morphology, and of the most frequently used syntactic structures. Elementary constructions are usually handled quite accurately, and writing is understandable to a native speaker not used to reading Spanish written by non-natives. Uses a limited number of cohesive devices such as direct object pronouns, and can delete redundant words with good accuracy. Has difficulty with indirect object constructions, however, typically treating the *a*-phrase as obligatory and the indirect object pronoun as optional (**Siempre doy regalos a mi novio.*) Uses verbs like *gustar, importar, faltar,* and *quedar* in certain fixed formulae, but without confidence or flexibility, and frequently follows English patterns: **Yo falto veinte dólares.* Able to join sentences in limited discourse, but has difficulty and makes frequent errors in producing complex sentences. Paragraphs are reasonably unified and coherent.

Advanced Plus

Shows ability to write about most common topics with some precision and in some detail. Can write fairly detailed resumés and summaries and take accurate notes. Can write most social and informal business correspondence. Can describe and narrate personal experiences and explain simply points of view in prose discourse using simple and compound verb tenses. Can write about concrete topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence. Normally controls general vocabulary with some circumlocution. Often shows remarkable fluency and ease of expressions, but under time constraints (e.g., no opportunity to rewrite), and pressure (e.g., testing), language may be inaccurate and/or incomprehensible. Generally strong in either grammar or vocabulary, but rarely in both. Weaknesses and unevenness in one of the foregoing or in spelling result in occasional miscommunication. Areas of weakness range sporadically from simple constructions, such as articles, prepositions, negatives and agreement, to more complex structures, such as tense usage (especially preterite and imperfect), passive or impersonal constructions, word order, relative clauses, and basic subjunctive constructions. Preterite vs. imperfect errors are especially likely with *haber* and *ser*, and when an arguably "ongoing"or "habitual" activity is circumscribed in time: **Estuvimos bailando toda la noche; Fui a la playa todos los días durante el mes que estuvimos allí.* Some misuse of vocabulary still evident, especially when using dictionary for words with multiple meanings or where related words carry various functions, but does use a dictionary to advantage where a fairly direct bilingual translation and no intralingual ambiguity exist. Shows ability to use circumlocution. Writing is understandable to native speakers not used to reading material written by non-natives, though the style is still obviously foreign.

*Denotes an error characteristic of speakers at this level.

Superior

Able to use written Spanish effectively in most formal and informal exchanges on practical, social, and professional topics. Can write most types of correspondence, such as memos, social and business letters (with appropriate formulaic introductions and closing), short research papers, and statements of position. Can express hypotheses and conjectures, and present arguments or points of view accurately and effectively. Can write about areas of special interest and handle topics in special fields. Has good control of a full range of structures so that time, description and narration can be used to expand upon ideas. Errors in basic structures are sporadic and not indicative of communicative control. In addition to simple tenses, can use compound tenses to show time relationships among events to express ideas clearly and coherently, but errors are sometimes made when using complex structures, such as indefinite, relative, or demonstrative pronouns when a range of tenses is necessary within a relatively short discourse. These errors are occasional and rarely disturb the native speaker. Has a wide enough vocabulary to convey the message accurately, though style may be foreign. Uses dictionary with a high degree of accuracy to supplement specialized vocabulary or to improve content or style. Although sensitive to differences in formal and informal style, still may not tailor writing precisely or accurately to a variety of audiences (except for personal vs. business correspondence) or styles.